



Engagement standards in participatory research for the Africa RISING Program

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Participatory research emphasizes the importance of engaging community members in all steps of the research process. Participatory research approaches therefore demand a level of engagement and commitment from farmers that researchers need to respect. This document provides some guidelines to researchers that will help to avoid negative relationships between them and farmers. In participatory research, farmers and researchers work closely together to ensure relevance of research and development.

Farmer engagement in research processes

Diagnostic studies

Gaining an understanding of the farming and wider livelihood systems targeted by research projects is an essential step in targeting research activities that will lead to impact and measurable development outcomes. As the first point of engagement between projects and communities, proper conduct of such studies can help to establish lasting trust and partnerships between all actors in the research process.

- Diagnostic studies are generally highly extractive in nature with farmers gaining little direct benefit from them. They will however raise farmers' expectations of future exchanges that operate on a two-way basis. It is not acceptable to conduct diagnostic studies without clear follow-up activities. It is imperative that researchers communicate realistic expectations and avoid leading community members to have unrealistic expectations. At the start of the research process, participants need to clearly state their goals, opportunities, fears and challenges.
- Having said this, well-conducted diagnostic studies generally stimulate dialog with participating farmers. "Sorry we don't have time, the next question is ..." is not an acceptable response to queries from farmers. Build time into interview schedules to allow you to respond fully to any questions / discussions that farmers might initiate.
- Farmers often give up a considerable portion of their busy days to participate in diagnostic activities. Respect this by conducting interview schedules on time and organising things, as far as possible so interviewees are not waiting around.
- When planning field activities of any type, but particularly for diagnostic group interviews, familiarise yourself with the farming calendar. There is no point arranging fieldwork during peak periods in the farming year (planting, weeding, harvesting etc.). Having a proper understanding of the gender activity profile would provide a clear understanding of the periods when women and men are available to participate actively in diagnostic activities.

¹ These guidelines will be reviewed and adjusted in line with evolving CGIAR guidelines around engagement, ethics, and data curation.

- You may be participating in a relatively well-funded initiative. The issue of offering participants incentives to join activities requires sensitive handling, particularly in relation to the options that are open to other agencies operating in the same area that may not be able to “compete”. Discuss incentives with other development actors and reach a consensus on appropriate levels of incentives that will not distort the local “market”!

Identifying research problems

It is imperative that the farming community is actively engaged in selection and prioritization of research areas. This fosters inclusiveness and integration of community perspectives in research thereby implementing research that is more responsive to farmers’ needs. During this process:

- Researchers and community members need to come to a mutual agreement when establishing research areas, approaches and identifying viable interventions. Researchers and community members determine what works and what does not work, or what is within the project limits and donor interest.
- Be realistic about what the research can accomplish to build trust among researchers and community members. However, one has to weigh the implications of disclosing negative realities on continuous engagement of community members.
- Gender roles influence the perceptions of men and women on research problems. Therefore gender has to be considered as a significant component in identifying research problems. Compare the similarities and differences between men and women’s experiences and perspectives and value them equally. This will generate a more comprehensive picture of the problem, and facilitate design of tools which will better address gender differences.
- Power relations between men and women influence their perspectives about their problems and proposed solutions. It is imperative that researchers take into account the roles of men and women and how these may impact on the outcomes of the research.
- Researchers need to listen to the voices of community members and share power in making research decisions. There is need to be sensitive to gender and cultural issues within a community.

Selection of research beneficiaries or participants

Researchers need to be flexible in determining who represents the community so as not to miss out on what is important for the community.

- Involve community leaders in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to further create a sense of ownership and acceptability of the research.
- It is important that researchers understand the levels of participation so that some people do not feel ‘forced’ to participate or intentionally excluded. Some people will be highly motivated to participate while others may not. Some of the people interested in participating might be hindered by other factors such as time.
- Pay special attention to the category of people who tend to be discriminated in research for development programs and lay strategies to include them. These could include women, youths and the landless among others.
- The interests of researchers and community members influence their perceptions on who to work with and how, where and when.

Conducting research



- When researchers and farmers agree to work together, the group has to decide on the modalities of working together. This includes setting goals and objectives, selecting methodology, agreeing on methods of communication, sharing roles and responsibilities and agreeing on the processes of data collection, monitoring and evaluation.
- Select gender sensitive tools, methodologies and approaches which will encourage and enhance active participation of men, women and youth and conserve integrity.
- Generate data that are meaningful to the community to create a sense of ownership and sustain participation. It's important that the research seeks information that will be useful to the community and also influence policy.
- Assess the impact of the proposed solutions on men and women in terms of their capacity to access resources, workload, social status, and power relations.
- Some of the meeting venues and time may not be convenient for men, women and youth to engage actively. Therefore, researchers should have a clear understanding of the effect of a venue and time on participation of men, women and youth to avoid exclusion.
- Conflict of interest between researchers and community members, or amongst researchers or among different groups within a community will be encountered at different stages of the research process. Community members and researchers need to come to an agreement on different aspects of the research at the onset to minimize conflicts.

Data handling

Ownership and custodianship of data collected by projects of this type is a sensitive issue.

- The general principle underlying this program's activities is that all data are under the shared ownership of all program partners.
- Custodianship will be determined by the capacity of the responsible organization to hold and distribute data securely.
- Publication rights are shared amongst all partners but original collection teams should be acknowledged in all cases. Authorship is granted to all partners who participate in the design, analysis and interpretation of studies that make use of project data but is not required for data collectors.
- Researchers should respect that the ultimate owners of the data collected are the farmers themselves. Engage community members in reporting back the research findings to increase ownership of research findings. Consideration of gender perspectives in analysis, interpretation and dissemination of data will enhance design of appropriate interventions.
- Maintain anonymity and confidentiality of farmers participating in the research. Researchers need to be creative in handling identifying information and provide utmost confidentiality of farmers' data.

Conclusions

Participatory research requires active involvement of farmers in the different stages of the research processes. The required level of engagement may not be achieved without respect for farmers as equal partners and recognition of their input. Participatory research requires proper understanding of the cultural, social, economic and political factors and how they influence participation. Gender and age

differences in access to resources, division of labour and institutional factors need to be considered throughout the process.

Bibliography

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